

Big Five Presents

Japan

Japan manages to blend old and new so seamlessly that the result is a dynamic and varied destination waiting to be explored.

Flamboyant pink cherry blossoms, fire-engine red paper lanterns, sunset gold silk, and the vermilion-lacquered galleries of Kasuga Shrine – the brilliant colors of both man and nature reflect the richness of Japan. Among the oldest nations on earth, Japan was inhabited by a Neolithic culture as early as the Jōmon period (14,000 – 300 BC). The first permanent capital founded at Nara in 710, which became a center of Buddhist art, religion and culture. Japan has depth in its traditions and cultures, arts and theater. Its castles and ancient villages are on display for the curious traveler. Volcanic mountains, rivers and seas divide the country into hundreds of small regions, and thousands of islands that make up the Japan Archipelago. The Japanese have a keenly developed sense of style, from cuisine chosen for color, texture and visual appeal, to the intricately planned gardens such as the famed Kenroku-en garden, begun in 1676 and completed some 170 years later. Japan is also very much a culture of today. Vibrant and energetic, it is a leader in the world of economics and technology.



Suggested Itinerary

Day 1: Tokyo, Japan

Welcome to Tokyo, Japan's energetic capital city.

Day 2: Tokyo

This is the largest metropolitan area of the world and the center of power in Japan for centuries.

Day 3: Tokyo / Nikko / Tokyo

Nikko has a rich history which includes its World Heritage Nikko Toshogu Shrine.

Day 4: Tokyo / Mt. Fuji / Hakone

Hakone, a collection of villages in the scenic mountains near Mt. Fuji, is famed for hot springs.

Day 5: Hakone / Takayama

Travel by train to Takayama, which has the feel of a medieval castle town.

Day 6: Takayama / Kanazawa

Drive to Kanazawa, en route stopping at Shirakawago, an UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Day 7: Kanazawa

Kanazawa is an old castle town surrounded by Japan Alps and two scenic national parks.

Day 8: Kanazawa / Kyoto

With its 1,600 Buddhist temples and 400 Shinto shrines, Kyoto one of the best preserved cities in Japan.

Day 9: Kyoto

Kyoto served as Japan's capital for 1,100 years and has a wealth of cultural and architectural gems to discover.

Day 10: Kyoto

Learn about Japan culture by participating in a choice of experiences such as: cooking, origami or dance.

Day 11: Kyoto

Enjoy a private tour of Kyoto, from Fushimi Inari Shrine to Tenryuji, a Zen temple in the mountains.

Day 12: Kyoto / Kansai / Depart

Custom Options

Beppu (3 days)

Beppu's reputation stems from thousands of hot springs that naturally occur in the area.

Hakone & Mt. Fuji (2 days)

Hakone is known for its hot-springs resorts and its proximity to Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan.

Okinawa (3 days)

The islands offer diverse attractions with nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, museums and often empty beaches.

Sapporo (4 days)

The Snow Festival in February draws people from around the globe to see the fantastic and fanciful ice sculptures.

About Japan

Beppu: Founded in 1924, Beppu is an infant in terms of Japanese cities. It gained attention for thousands of hot springs that occur naturally in the area. The volume of hot water generated is second only to Yellowstone in the U.S. Beppu's nine major geothermal hot spots are sometimes called the "nine hells of Beppu."

Hakone & Mt. Fuji: Hakone is in Fuji Hakone Izu National Park; and is known as a hot-springs resort area. The city is home to excellent museums – Hakone Open Air Museum, Narukawa Art Museum for modern Japanese works, Pola Museum of Art and Venetian Glass Museum. Hakone features entertaining ways to view the area such as the Hakone Ropeway Glide, the world's second-longest cable car; and on the scenic Hakone Tozan Railway. Boats cruise on the serenely beautiful Lake Ashinoko. Mt. Fuji, at 3,776 meters / 12,388 feet, is the highest in Japan. The summit has been thought

sacred since time immemorial. The first ascent is thought to have been in 663 by an anonymous monk. The first foreigner to scale the summit was Sir Rutherford Alcock in 1860. Access was forbidden to women until the mid-19th century. An estimated 200,000 people climb it annually. Paragliding is also popular. At the base are Fuji's Five Lakes and Kitaguchi-Hongu Fuji-Sengen-jinja Shrine. The forest at the base of the mountain is rich in tales of demons, ghosts and goblins in the forest.

Kyoto & Nara: Kyoto was the center of politics and culture for more than a millennium. The seat of government moved from Kyoto to Tokyo in the mid-19th century. With 2,000 religious sites, 1,600 Buddhist temples, 400 Shinto shrines, palaces and gardens, it is one of the best preserved cities in Japan. Kiyomizu-dera, a superb wooden temple, and Nijo Castle are among the city's 17 historic UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Sites. Kyoto offers opportunities to delve into Japanese traditions such as the famous tea ceremony, the art of Kimono wearing, Japanese flower arranging, the arts of origami and calligraphy, dance or cooking. In 710, Nara became the capital, and many of its temples and shrines date from that time. Todai-ji Temple has the world's largest Buddha statue. Made of copper and gold, it is enshrined in the world's largest wooden structure. Horyu-ji Temple, from the early seventh century, is believed to be the oldest Buddhist temple in Japan. Nara Park is home to indigenous deer once revered as envoys of the gods.

Okinawa: Okinawa is one of Japan's southern prefectures, and consists of hundreds of the Ryukyu Islands in a chain over 620 miles long. The capital, Naha, is in the southern region of the largest and most populous island, Okinawa Island. Okinawan culture was influenced by various trading partners, including Chinese, Thai and Austronesian. Okinawa's most famous cultural export is perhaps karate, probably due to the close ties with China. As a small kingdom, Okinawa prospered in the region, developing its own unique history and culture. The Ryukyu language developed separately from the rest of Japan over 1,500 years. Museums include Himeyuri Peace Prayer and Memorial Museum, Ishikawa City History and Folklore Museum, Nakagusuku Castle Museum, and several craft and cultural centers. Islanders are known for their artistic works in ceramics, textiles and glass. It also boasts a lively music scene, wonderful beaches and old world markets.

Sapporo: Sapporo is the fourth largest city in Japan by population. It is best known outside Japan for hosting the 1972 Winter Olympics, the first ever held in Asia. It is famous for the annual Sapporo Snow Festival, which draws more than two million tourists from around the world. It is also noted for its exclusive white chocolate biscuits.



Takayama & Kanazawa: Both Takayama and Kanazawa are fascinating examples of Japan's castle towns, which developed around the castles of feudal lords. Few of those original structures remain, but towns such as Takayama have managed to preserve some of its architectural legacy and medieval atmosphere. Many structures remain from the 1600s when the city thrived as a town of merchants. In old town, some of the shops, coffee houses and sake breweries have been in business for centuries. Hida-Kokubunji Temple has a three-story pagoda that stands beside a ginkgo tree that is more than 1,200 years old. Ankokuji Temple dates from 1408. Kusakabe Folklore Museum was originally one of the early 19th century merchant's homes. It was the first of several houses designated as national cultural treasures. Kanazawa was ruled by one family for 300 years, and has some 70 temples. Its rainy, temperate climate encourages agricultural production of rice, sake and sweets. The Japanese love of gardening can be seen in the Kenroku-en, one of the three most famous gardens in Japan. Beginning in 1676, it took about 170 years to construct this massive landscape. The Japan Alps, Hakusan National Park and Noto Peninsula National Park edge Kanazawa, and two rivers add to the relaxed feel of the city.

Tokyo: Japan's capital, with more than 12 million people, is among the most populous cities in the world. It is the political and economical heart of Japan as well as a major player on the world stage. Tokyo was already a small fishing village named Edo, when Edo Castle was built in 1457. In 1590, the first shogun made the town his base and the center of his national military government. By the 1700s, Tokyo was home to more than one million, making it one of the largest cities in the world. It suffered two devastating events: Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and bombing in the WWII. Tokyo, however, reemerged

stronger each time. The well-known area of Ginza is speckled with international designer shops while Akihabara is a busy retail area crammed with electronic stores. Tokyo Tower Observatory offers sweeping panoramas of the city. Asakusa neighborhood is noted for its many temples, particularly Sensōji. Asakusa Kannon Temple is said to be Tokyo's oldest temple, dating back to 628 A.D.

Best Time To Go

Japan's climate varies from tropical in the south to cool temperate in the north. The rainy season begins in early June and continues for about a month. The climate June-September is hot, and wet, brought on by tropical airflows from the Pacific Ocean and Southeast Asia. Typhoon season last early August-early September. Plum blossoms start blooming at the end of February. Sakura or cherry blossoms bloom in March-April on the mainland in Japan. The most popular time to hike Mt. Fuji is from July-August, while huts and other facilities are operating.

*\$800 - \$1650 per person per day
Land only, double occupancy*

Consider enhancing your adventure by including the following destinations: China (p53-56), Thailand (p81-84), Vietnam (p85-88)



